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STATE HEALTH OFFICIALS WARN OF LAWN MOWER DANGERS

INDIANAPOLIS---Summer brings green grass to Indiana, but also the potential for serious injury from power lawn mowers. State health officials warn that children can be severely injured from contact with the rotating blades of a lawn mower.

"These injuries are preventable," said Charlene Graves, M.D., medical director, Injury Prevention Program at the Indiana State Department of Health. "Children should always be kept away from an area being mowed."

Health experts estimate that between 1,700 and 2,000 children in the United States are injured each year by riding power lawn mowers. During 2003 in Indiana, 37 percent of all lawn-mower related injuries that were serious enough to require hospitalization involved children less than 16 years of age.

"Especially alarming is the disproportionate share of young children and adolescents affected, and the severe injuries that preschool-age children receive from riding mowers," said Dr. Graves, who is a pediatrician.

"The majority of lawn mower-related injuries are to the legs, feet, or toes," said Dr. Graves. "When children come in contact with the rotating blades of the lawn mower, the resulting injuries often cause deep cuts to body tissues and bones, requiring many surgical operations."

Health officials say that children most commonly come in contact with lawn mower blades either while operating the mower themselves when too young to do so, or are preschoolers and school-age children who fall off a mower while riding with an adult.

The American Academy of Pediatrics offers these tips to parents:

- While the lawn is being mowed, keep others, especially young children, away to ensure their safety;
- Do not allow children younger than 16 to use ride-on mowers and do not allow children younger than 12 to use walk-behind mowers;
- Use only a power mower with a control that stops the mower if the handle is let go, and be certain this control is never disconnected;
- Make sure that an adult adjusts the blade settings, to set the wheel height or to dislodge debris, and only when the mower is off and the spark plug is removed or disconnected;
- Wear sturdy shoes and protective eyewear while operating the mower; and
- Pick up objects from the lawn, like stones or toys, before mowing.

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